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A Conversation in New Orleans

On August 8, 2007, the Hamilton Fish Institute staff held a frank and open discussion about schooling and juvenile justice in NOLA. We convened a powerful group of activists, students, advocates, juvenile justice and Recovery School District (RSD) officials from NOLA, as well as experts from around the country who specialize in mental health, charter schools, housing, youth development, policy analysis and education. All of the national experts were from organizations that have current plans to open offices or projects in New Orleans.

Since the rebuilding effort in New Orleans started, conflicting accounts of the plight of the New Orleans Public Schools have circulated. On one hand, the state takeover of schools that resulted in the establishment of the Recovery School District and government funded charter schools is said to be the way to accountability.

The re-invention of these schools is said to be the model for the rescue of public schooling, not only in NOLA, but the nation as well.

On the other hand, the complex racial, social class, organizational and governance issues created by the post-Katrina school district are troubling. More than 18% of the school population was suspended or expelled last school year. Prior to Katrina, rates of 13% or more were common.

Suspension and expulsion leads to dropping out of school, juvenile justice problems and other first steps on the slippery slope from schoolhouse to jailhouse.

Local people stressed issues concerning equity, rebuilding schools and the city for privileged people first with little effort or resources being SEEN or FELT by poor people, increasing criminalization by schools for what Judge David Bell calls "childish behavior" and a feeling that poor people are unwelcome in the new New Orleans. One of the school sub-districts within the RSD selects students according to grade point average + test score + no prior disciplinary history + residency. Some of these criteria are suspect at face value.

The conversation, facilitated by Rev. David Bowers, president of Enterprise Foundation (DC) and co-founder of No Murder DC, asked for ideas about several questions that were jointly developed by HFI staff and NOLA participants:

- What's happening now, including the good, the bad and the ugly?
- What conditions existed in schools pre- and post-Katrina?
- How do we assist young people in understanding the relevance of education when their world has been changed so drastically?

Responses to the "ugly" question included complaints about an over-emphasis on command and control in schools at the expense of academics, children "raising themselves and growing up in jail."

About 1/3 of the children in NOLA are not currently living with their parents. Schools are understaffed, and most school buildings have yet to be repaired or

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Executive Director's Corner

Will Local Government Take-Over of Public Schools Improve the Quality of Public Education?

Over the last 20 years, replacing elected school boards with mayoral or state organizational and governance structures has become popular.

More than 24 urban districts have had such takeovers. Schools in Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York City, Washington DC, Newark, Patterson NJ, Boston, Los Angeles, and New Orleans have been realigned because they were in fiscal crisis or under-performing academically.

Historically, urban schools were placed under elected school boards with "professional" superintendents during the Progressive Era of the 1890s in order to remove them from the political strife caused by patronage wars, questionable partisan politics and other challenges.

(See Raymond Callahan's *Education and the Cult of Efficiency*.) As more and more schools have failed in their mission to provide a thorough and efficient education to all children regardless of race, creed, color, national origin, religion, gender, English language proficiency, sexual orientation or social class, other methods for progress are being attempted.

Will takeovers improve the ability of

struggling school systems to help their students? Our understanding of schools and communities leads us to believe that there are multiple levels of political will, economic might and city, suburban, rural horse trading that must be addressed if urban schools are to succeed.

According to child psychiatrist James Comer, all decisions at all levels must be made in the best interest of children. Young people thrive where there is adequate funding for schools and where there is the intention to make poor children's schools as good as the schools that middle class students attend.

After 20 years of tinkering, the jury is still out about the efficacy of mayoral and state takeover of schools. However, our research over the past 10 years has shown what is necessary to make schools persistently safe and conducive to high achievement.

Schools that promote safety and achievement for all have:

- Enrollments of 500 students or fewer
- Rigorous academic programs that involve all students regard-

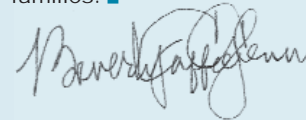
less of academic ability

- Students who are emotionally and intellectually attached to the adults who run the school
- Arts, drama, music, physical education, after school programs, extra curricular activities
- Strong leaders and teachers with high expectations for student success

As we watch what happens while the dust settles, keep your eye on these indicators of success:

1. Increasing Black and Hispanic male achievement
2. Decreasing suspension and expulsion rates of black males
3. Decreasing truancy rates
4. Increasing graduation rates

We hope that new governance means new outcomes for all children, youth and families. ■



A Conversation in New Orleans, *Continued from page 1*

replaced two years after Katrina.

An RSD official told the group that desks, books, computers, blackboards and other equipment had to be scrapped whether they got wet or not because mold invaded walls, ceilings and other spaces in the schools.

RSD had six weeks to clean and repair physical plants and replace everything before the start of the school year. Vendors around the country did not have

enough stock or time to supply the schools. A smoother start was promised for this school year.

A high school student remarked that her school began the last school year with 800 students, 35 security guards and five NOLA policemen. Only 300 kids finished out the school year. The young lady wanted school to be "a safe place and not a scary place" because every disciplinary infraction, even backtalk, became a police matter. The school to jail pipeline contin-

ues in NOLA.

Change is going to come however. A young man remarked that being evacuated into schools in other districts and states let all of them know "how school spozed (sic) to be." Community activism is resurgent.

A parent wanted all the newly-hired teachers to be trained in the culture and history of NOLA while considering the stresses under which children and parents

To Suspend or Not to Suspend

What to do with disruptive and/or at-risk students is a problem in many school districts. Simply suspending them, or worse yet, expelling them, is an option. However, some school districts opt not to just "throw the baby out with the wash water" and are using alternative methods to try to help these students to, not just stay in school, but to succeed in school, graduate and become productive contributing members of society. Indeed, according to Grant East, the founder of TEXANS CAN! "A high-school diploma is the difference between a life of hope and a life of hopelessness."

For the past 13 years many of the districts that have programs focused on alternatives to suspension and expulsion have participated in an annual conference organized by the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay and the National Alternative Education Association. This year, these districts presented 52 sessions that described their models and creative techniques "to get kids to learn."

Their goals were very similar: to help at-risk students succeed where they have typically not enjoyed much success in the classroom by providing programs designed to meet the unique educational needs of this population. Frances Rizo, chairman of TEXANS CAN!, summarized these goals very eloquently when she said, "Like the chemicals that make up the Periodic Table, students have their own distinctive characteristics, with their own learning styles. It is our goal, as their leaders, to serve as the catalyst that opens their minds to learning and leads them to a future filled with possibilities."

The models presented also had similar core values and elements for success, including:

- Belief that all children can learn

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Morehouse School of Medicine Spearheads Programs To Reduce School and Community Violence



For more than two decades, Dr. James P. Griffin Jr., a research assistant professor in Morehouse School of Medicine's Department of Community Health and Preventive Medicine, has focused his efforts on alcohol, tobacco, drugs and violence prevention. Griffin talks about two city-wide initiatives that are positively impacting Atlanta.

Q: *What is the Metropolitan Atlanta Violence Prevention Partnership (MAVPP)?*

A: MAVPP began in October 2005 and its mission is promoting healthy families and healthy communities. For the first time in metro Atlanta, we have brought together representatives from community- and faith-based organizations, academics, schools and government to energize and strengthen violence prevention. Participants include WSB-TV, the Atlanta Police Department, Atlanta Public Schools, Georgia State University, Clark Atlanta University, Emory University and various community-based organizations.

Q: *What kind of violent activity are we talking about?*

A: There are four key city-wide program areas: school violence, street violence, gang violence and sexual violence. The greatest concern we have is in homicides among African-

American males between the ages of 19-44 in a five-county target area. The rate of violence is as much as 10 times higher than death rates for males in other cultures in that age group. It's heart-wrenching.

Q: *Put this in perspective for us. Aren't we all affected?*

A: You are exactly right. These are systematic issues that are far-reaching. One way or another, regardless of race or socio-economics, our entire community is affected by violence. The MAVPP's long-term goal is to serve as a clearinghouse for violence prevention, including family violence, domestic violence, elder abuse, child maltreatment, even suicide treatment. Creating more advocates in those areas is key, as is bringing in the business community.

Q: *What sorts of things is MAVPP doing?*

A: This is a capacity-building initiative. We are helping people who provide violence prevention services to do a better job of violence prevention. We do this through an initiative that is an offspring of the MAVPP. We conduct assessments and based on our findings, tailor our efforts to the individual organization. We train students how to better negotiate their environment without resorting to violence. These research-based alternatives followed a study I published last year in the Journal of School Violence. The program also uses peer influence to encourage non-violence and positive behavior.

Q: *So you are, in effect, supporting those on the front lines?*

A: We are building organizations that will employ strategies and methodologies that come out of solid research. We are tying together different partners to share what works. Everything doesn't have to be our baby. Our goal is to give away owner-

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Applying the Full Spectrum of Crime Prevention Expertise to Legislative Provisions

by Congressman Robert C. Scott, Chairman, House Subcommittee on Crime



As the current Chairman and long-term-member of the Subcommittee on Crime, I know that with crime policy you have a choice: you can reduce crime or you can play politics- but you can't do both.

The politics of crime involves slogans or sound-bites such as "mandatory minimum sentencing," "three strikes, you're out" or "ya do the adult crime, ya' do the adult time." They sound good. But, in reality they do more to increase crime than to reduce it, giving America the highest incarceration rate in the world. And the situation is most egregious with juveniles.

Of the more than 2,200 inmates around the world who received life sentences as juveniles, all but 13 are in the United States.

All available research demonstrates that a continuum of services, from teen pregnancy prevention to job training, reduces

crime and saves more money than it costs. To implement sound crime policy, I have sought to gather and apply the full spectrum of crime prevention expertise to legislative provisions for such programs as Head Start and *No Child Left Behind*.

I have also held a crime policy summit, co-hosted an education Summit, and have held crime subcommittee hearings on juvenile justice such as our February 15 hearing, "Making Communities Safer: Youth Violence and Gang Interventions that Work."

We also held a joint hearing on reauthorizing the "Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act" with the Committee on Education and Labor, of which I am also a long-term member.

To further apply what we have learned about crime prevention I will be introducing the "Youth Gang Reduction and Opportunity to Thrive (Youth GROWTH) Act of 2007." Youth GROWTH will be groundbreaking legislation providing research, prevention and intervention resources.

Throughout my Congressional tenure, I will continue to emphasize these types of programs because we know they will reduce crime. ■

To Suspend or Not to Suspend. *Continued from page 3*

- Belief that all children are of immeasurable value and incalculable worth
- Children learn best in a safe, secure, compassionate, positive, and nurturing environment that builds self-esteem and teaches respect for others.

Staff from HFI presented two sessions at the conference. Danny Rice and April Weber presented a session on how youth summits can engage youth in issues that affect them. They identified the benefits of these summits from the lessons-learned from HFI's May 2006 summit, which was organized and convened for 45 high school students from Washington, DC, Maryland, and Virginia as well as from current research. Additionally, they stressed the importance of organizing activities that help youth focus on their strengths and skills, as opposed to their weaknesses, and the role resiliency plays in helping youth overcome challenges.

Dennis White, presented "Team-Based Excellence in Alternative Education," an interactive session designed to help

participants to start, manage, and/or improve an alternative education program or school, using the criteria for judging the International Team Excellence Award from the American Society for Quality. He focused on needs assessment, identification and participation of team members and stakeholders, program purpose, development of program options, implementation, evaluation and results, and process/program management.

The Fourteenth Joint National Conference on Alternatives to Expulsion, Suspension, and Dropping Out of School will be held January 31-February 2, 2008, at the Royal Plaza Hotel, Disney World Resort, Lake Buena Vista, Florida. If you would like to join other community and school-based alternative educators, along with leaders from government, business, labor and community groups, to share ideas about what works in serving at-risk youth at this conference next year, go to www.uwgb.edu/outreach/alternatives. ■

Morehouse School of Medicine Spearheads Programs To Reduce School and Community Violence, *Continued from page 3*

ship of the technology and state-of-the-art techniques, achieve full saturation and create a sustainable science and research program in the community.

Q: *What do you mean by full saturation?*

A: The whole city would receive the best available violence protection services. We wouldn't have some metro areas getting high-quality services and some hardly impacted. Everyone would be using what is known to work.

Q: *The second program originated out of the MAVPP and it is called the Atlanta Violence Prevention Capacity Building Project (ACBP). Tell us about it.*

A: Four organizations — MSM, The Advocacy Foundation, Genesis Prevention Coalition and Visions Unlimited — have come together to provide school-based materials and curricula to reduce school-based violence. Some public high schools in our city are having unbelievable gang-related scuffles, out-and-out bedlam with fighting.

Q: *What's the strategy?*

A: ACBP uses a capacity-building framework to provide training and technical assistance at no charge for 500 participants over a three-year period. In fact, I think we can train 1,000 people. We will address the challenges of interpersonal youth violence and gang involvement with something more constructive. After only a year, we have had tremendous accomplishments! An integral part of the program is a plan to expose faith-based organizations, schools, law enforcement and other community-based organizations to a top-of-the-line violence prevention strategy called PeaceBuilders.

Q: *What is PeaceBuilders?*

A: PeaceBuilders is a strategy from a national organization that we are rolling out in Atlanta in 2007. In an effort to promote a nonviolent environment, PeaceBuilders works to encourage high behavioral expectations and improve the school climate.

Q: *So what yields high expectations?*

A: There are six principles: 1. Praise people 2. Right wrongs 3. Give up put-downs 4. Seek wise people 5. Notice and speak up about hurts 6. Help others. PeaceBuilders works one-on-one with the kids themselves. The youth carry a message of accountability that cuts violence.

Q: *These are the kinds of behaviors you would hope would be taught at home.*

A: Yes, but many kids do not get these guidelines at home. Too many of these inner-city kids that we are talking about have absentee fathers and absent mothers or mothers with substance abuse problems. Not in all cases, but the parents are not necessarily there for them. Kids are raising kids. That's the reason they don't get principles like this.

Q: *What makes this program different?*

A: Kids are the driving force of PeaceBuilders. If the adults are out of line or inconsistent, they let us know! Former gang members serve as facilitators of violence prevention. A Youth Advisory Board operates parallel to the Adult Advisory Board; they attended the National Coalition Building Conference in Washington, D.C., and did a blog on efforts to prevent violence. Some of the youth who help with our violence prevention efforts are a mixture of goody-two shoes kids and hard-core gang members. We are also having a Peace Week kick-off that Douglass High School is conducting with Elizabeth Baptist Church to help kids take ownership.

Q: *That would certainly lend credibility to the program.*

A: Yes, it's very compelling.

Q: *What else is innovative about ACBP?*

A: We are not going to hoard the training. Each of the three partners has 50 slots, so we can train 200 PeaceBuilders. But if MSM only uses 25 slots, we will open up the remaining slots to law enforcement and other faith- and community-based organizations that are not directly funded. That

is a coup for Atlanta. We will provide training and curriculum to upgrade the overall quality of services.

Q: *How will you evaluate the program's success?*

A: We are very, very excited about our audio-enhanced, computer-assisted, structured interviewing. We have state-of-the-art evaluation methodology to upgrade our data collection methods.

Q: *Can you explain how that will work?*

A: We will use handheld computers or personal digital assistants (PDAs). Questions in the surveys are entered onto the handheld computer; headphones are attached. The device reads the questions to the high schooler who taps the answer in, and then it reads the next question, and so on until the end. Kids love it. It's their way of operating in the 21st century with video games and iPods. The data is then copied to the desktop computer for analysis, eliminating the data entry bottleneck. It's critical for kids who have reading comprehension difficulties. It also encourages kids to be more forthcoming about answering sensitive questions since there is greater privacy.

Q: *Wow! What a great idea!*

A: Only a few researchers on the front lines are teaching community-based organizations to use them for gauging program success. It's a completely different class of sophistication. Atlanta's community-based organizations will lead the country in using this PDA technology. The downside is getting enough PDAs to simultaneously collect information. The upside is the level of quality of data.

Q: *Your work is heavy, but you sound upbeat.*

A: Sometimes I get completely worn out, but I'm resilient and I enjoy it. It's about forming genuine partnerships in order to help communities become healthier. ■

The 2007 National Conference on Safe Schools and Communities

October 29-31, Washington, D.C.

HFI's National Conference on Safe Schools and Communities 2007 will be held October 29-31, 2007, at the District of Columbia's *Hotel Washington*.

Researchers, teachers, administrators and violence prevention practitioners at all levels from around the country will gather for a comprehensive forum covering the latest research on creating safe schools and, more importantly, how to apply that research in schools.

The three-day conference will feature informative discussions about the state of school violence with emphasis (featured tracks) on Bullying Prevention, Mentoring, Program Evaluation and Community Programs.

The conference will open Monday, October 29th with the opening address by J. Robert Flores, Administrator, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. This will be followed by the

keynote address: "The Role of Prevention Programs in Teen Violence and in Teen Relationships", delivered by Regina B. Schofield, Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs.

During the luncheon, Mary Hatwood Futrell, Dean, Graduate School of Education and Human Development, GWU, will give the keynote address, titled, "How Colleges and Universities Can Structure Education Leadership Programs to Make Schools Safer for Learning."

On Tuesday October 30, Deborah A. Price, Assistant Deputy Secretary, Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools will give the opening keynote address, "The Unsafe School Choice Option (USCO)." The Honorable Robert C. "Bobby" Scott is invited to deliver the luncheon keynote address.

On the final day of the conference, Wednesday October 31, the keynote

speaker will be Joseph Persichini, Jr., Assistant Director, Washington Field Office, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Additional conference session topics include, but are not limited to: alternative education, crisis response planning, mental health, youth leadership, protective factors/resilience, early care and education, and school climate.

For registration and more information on HFI's 2007 Safe Schools and Communities conference, visit <http://www.hamfish.org>.

Conference participation is limited to the first 400 registrants and a reduced hotel room rate of \$169.00 (plus tax) is available for participants until October 8, or while space is available. ■

A Conversation in New Orleans, *Continued from page 2*

currently live.

Participants were encouraged by the explanation of short and long term corrections by a high official of the RSD. A Welcome School is being established so that returning children can be enrolled for up to two weeks while their academic, health and placement affairs are handled. Every child is promised a seat in a school - no one will be turned away.

More money will be invested into regular and after school programs; there will be lower pupil: teacher ratios, stronger models of parent/community/school collaboration and greater communications with citizens by the Superintendent. (See "Recovery School District Legislatively Required Plan.")

The final portion of the conversation was facilitated by Scott Peterson, a pro-

gram manager with the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention, US Department of Justice.

Peterson led the group in a discussion of what programs are needed and where to access funding for those programs. Participants wanted more vocational and technical education; mentoring programs that paired college students with younger students; parent resource centers that start with training for the parents of infants and toddlers; and programs that communicate the ins and outs of the juvenile justice system to parents and teens.

As the meeting adjourned, many of the NOLA participants promised to get together at other venues to continue the sustained community action they'd said was necessary.

HFI staff has had subsequent conversa-

tions with several of the participants. While there is a deep well of anger and despair that little progress has been made two years post-Katrina, everyone we talked to is encouraged that education and juvenile justice have been brought to the forefront by this calamity.

Those most negatively affected in the aftermath of Katrina are more determined than ever to change their own plight through demanding more from their elected officials.



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